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October 26, 1998

Bare Knuckles

The night Billy Collins fought Luis Resto, something was terribly wrong with Resto's gloves. The beating Collins took cost him his career—and maybe his life

Jeff Pearlman

You want to believe Luis Resto. You really do. He is a victim, you tell yourself, and you almost buy it. He says he didn't know. Couldn't have. He's just another pawn in the system, still feeling the effects of that night 15 years ago. Resto was just a boxer then, listening to his trainer. Whatever Panama Lewis said, Resto did. Panama was the boss, right?

Luis, remember to double up on the rights.

Yes, Panama.

Luis, don't dance so much.

O.K., Panama.

Luis, put these gloves on.

Sure, Panama.

Today Resto is broke and living in a small, dank basement apartment under the Morris Park Boxing Gym in the Bronx, while Carlos (Panama) Lewis has a house in Florida and an apartment in Las Vegas. "That whole thing makes me angry," Resto, 42, says softly. "Panama, he can go to hell. F---Panama."

You want to believe Resto because, to be honest, he is not the brightest bulb in the box. He speaks poorly. His smile is as innocent as a child's. To make money he works in construction. He's a security guard at a store. He sweeps the gym. It is easy to see him, on that long-ago fight night, simply doing as he was told.

Luis, put these gloves on.

Sure, Panama.

"Were the gloves illegal?" he asks, sitting on a worn bench in the gym. After a long pause, he says, "I don't know."

Look at the tape of the fight, on June 16, 1983, at the man throwing punch after punch. Resto's skin is pure Puerto Rico, dark and smooth. His bounce is lively. A black ponytail dangles down his neck. Today he looks old and worn, a tired man with no ponytail, no bounce. "I tell you this," he continues after another long pause. "I just put on the gloves and fought. I trained long for the fight. I worked harder than ever. I didn't cheat. And I didn't kill Billy Collins. Not me."

You want to believe Panama Lewis. You really do. He is a victim, you tell yourself, and you almost buy it. He says he didn't know. Couldn't have. He's just another pawn in the system, still feeling the effects of that night 15 years ago. So what if he refuses to talk to the media? Can anybody blame him? The man has been raked over the coals like a jailed dictator. "Panama is a very humble person," says Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, 46, a onetime light heavyweight who trained under Lewis in the early '80s. "He has taken everything society has thrown at him with class and dignity. He served his time. Society should let the man earn a living again."

Lewis, 52, was one of the best cornermen of his time, right up there with Emanuel Steward and Lou Duva. He trained Mike Tyson, Tony Tucker and Francois Botha, worked with Don King and pulled down more than a couple of bills. But what about those years in prison? What about being banned permanently from working the corner? He didn't kill anyone, did he?

Besides, who actually saw Lewis remove the padding from Resto's boxing gloves? Sure, something that looked like horsehair was seen on the floor of the fighter's locker room at Madison Square Garden. But why would Lewis do such a thing? For such an insignificant fight? Maybe for Roberto Durán when he fought Sugar Ray Leonard the first time. But Luis Resto—Billy Ray Collins Jr.? What would have been the point? "Panama Lewis did nothing," says Sterling McPherson, Botha's manager. "I know the kind of person he is, and there's no way he would pull something like that. Somebody set him up."

You want to believe Billy Ray Collins Sr. You really do. He is a victim, you tell yourself, and you almost buy it. He says he didn't know. Couldn't have. He's just another pawn in the system, still feeling the effects of that night 15 years ago. Besides, his son is dead.

"The fight killed Ray," says Collins, sitting on a couch in his small house in Antioch, Tenn. "He may have not died that night, but he was as good as dead."

Collins was working the corner for his son, who was known in the family as Ray, in a 10-round junior middleweight bout against Resto on the Davey Moore—Roberto Durán undercard at the Garden. Ray, just 21, was 14-0. He expected to knock out Resto, a soft-punching 20-7-2 fighter. He expected to go on to a title bout.

He took the beating of a lifetime. Midway through the fight he told his father, "It feels like he's got rocks in his gloves." There were no knockdowns, but after 10 rounds Ray's face was purple and his eyes were swollen shut. "I'm blind," he would say later that night, crying. "I can't see a thing."

Immediately after the fight, when Billy Ray Collins Sr. stuck out his hand and shook Resto's right glove, he felt leather over fist—no padding. The ensuing dialogue was captured by the TV cameras.

Collins: "Hey! All of the padding is out of the damn gloves. It's all out."

Resto (looking across the ring toward Lewis for help): "Huh?"

Collins: "Commissioner.... Commissioner! No padding.... There's no damn padding."

Nine months later, in the early hours of March 7, 1984, a drunken Billy Ray Collins Jr., out of boxing, unemployed and deeply depressed, drove his '72 Oldsmobile Cutlass off Old Franklin Road in Antioch and into Collins Creek, which had been named for his ancestors. He died on impact.

"You don't think Resto knew he didn't have padding in the gloves?" Billy Ray Sr. says. "You don't think Panama Lewis took it out? I've had 15 years to think about it, and I know—I know—that they did. They killed him. They killed my son."

There are two tombstones atop Billy Ray Collins Jr.'s grave site at the Woodlawn Funeral Home in Nashville. One, put there by his widow, Andrea Collins Morse, reads A GREAT FIGHTER. The other, furnished by his parents, Billy Ray Sr. and Bettye Collins, says: I ASKED JESUS 'HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?' 'THIS MUCH,' HE ANSWERED. THEN HE STRETCHED OUT HIS ARMS AND DIED.

"I think about my son every day," says Billy. "I can't help it."

"Collins is in my mind," says Resto. "Always."

"That's a ghost Panama has had to live with for far too long," says McPherson. "He'll never be able to escape it."

Nowhere does Collins's presence loom larger than in Antioch, a small community 10 miles south of Nashville. Billy and Bettye Collins live there in a tiny blue house that's one strong gust away from kindling. They are poor. Three rooms, lots of old furniture and old memories. Money comes in the form of Bettye's disability check, a result of the rheumatoid arthritis that makes her unable to work. Billy receives a pension from his career as a truck driver.

On the walls are reminders. A black-and-white portrait of Ray, fists up. Ray's high school graduation shot. Trophies. In the back closet is a suitcase that contains much of the boy's gear—a mouthpiece, a tank top, some white tape. When they look through it, Bettye and Billy usually cry. Fourteen years, and the tears still roll easily. "He was gonna be a champion," says Billy. "Would've whupped Leonard and Tommy

Hearns, I know that."

Ever since Ray's death, Billy, 61, has been on painkillers and antidepressants. His smoking keeps Marlboro in business. "Sad," says his wife. "Billy's always sad."

Bettye, 59, is a woman who stands behind her man—no questions asked. Billy is something different: angry, scowling, often intimidating. His nose, twisted and bent like a wad of chew, bears the marks of his boxing days, when Irish Billy Collins was closing in on a shot at the welterweight title. He retired in 1966 with a professional record of 37-17-1 and little money. His next career was driving rigs cross-country. "You think I wanted my son to follow me into boxing?" he asks. "Hell, no. But boxing was in his blood."

The four Collins siblings—Ray; Ann, 39; Lacy, 38; and Amy, 24—were brought up amid the smell of combat. Not only did Billy train fighters, but he also trained and fought pit bulls. The kids often trailed along to the dogfights, usually held in muddy pits fenced in by chicken wire. Pit bull fighting is the ultimate savagery: two combatants ripping each other to shreds. Billy made sure the message to his kids was clear: The tough win.

By the time Ray reached his early teens, he was waking up at 5 a.m., running five or six miles, going to school and coming home for workouts with his father. He had his first amateur bout at 13 and quickly earned a reputation around Nashville as a rugged s.o.b. with a lethal right. He fought his way to a 101-7-2 amateur record. He was talented, personable and white—all the things boxing was looking for. "He had the whole package," says Randy Gordon, a former Ring magazine editor and New York State boxing commissioner.

On Dec. 2, 1981, in Atlantic City, Collins made his professional debut, knocking out a tin can named Kevin Griffin in three rounds. Collins had 13 more fights over the next year and a half, including impressive victories over Dennis Home and Ricky Whitt, two contenders. He fought 12 times on ESPN. By June 1983 he was an undefeated up-and-comer with lots of dreams. He was 21, had won about \$80,000 in purses and had married his 18-year-old high school sweetheart. They were expecting a baby any week. Boxing was his business, and business was good.

Then there was that Saturday night at the Garden.

Luis Resto was an eighth-grader, sitting in math class, when his future was decided for him. This was at P.S. 133 in the Bronx, a rough-and-tumble school where a kid without a rep was a kid without lunch money. Four years earlier, when Luis was nine, he and his mom and two siblings had moved to New York City from the town of Juncos, Puerto Rico.

In the middle of class a teacher yelled at Luis for talking. "I wasn't the only one saying things," he says today, still angry. "There were others too." No matter. The teacher grabbed Luis by the arm. Luis smashed his elbow into the teacher's face. "They didn't want me in school after that," he recalls. He was sent to a Bronx hospital that had a rehabilitation center for the mentally disturbed. Every day, he recalls, there were pills and shots. "I was there for six months of hell," he says. "It messes you up good. Finally, my mother took me out."

Luis never went back to school. He worked as a grocery bagger for a couple of months, until an uncle signed him up for boxing lessons at a Bronx gym. "They never really said I was good," Luis says. "They said I was tough." He was—tough enough to win three New York Golden Gloves titles. Never an especially hard puncher, he got by with speed and savvy and a sturdy chin.

"If you watch his fights, you see how smart he was," says Lou (Honey Boy) Del Valle, a light heavyweight who trains at the Morris Park Boxing Gym. "Even now he's got the tools—slippin', movin'." Still, Resto was never more than a club fighter who could take a lot of punches. The Collins bout, at \$10,000, was easily his biggest payday. It was arranged "to showcase the kid," says Teddy Brenner, the fight's promoter. "The kid" was Collins.

Resto, then 27, lived in a small Bronx apartment with his wife and two children. He was ranked 10th in the world, but his name meant little outside New York. No matter. He had his future planned, and it was bright. The first step was to win on Saturday night at the Garden.

Panama Lewis has a lot of things going for him. He has plenty of friends, plenty of money and plenty of know-how. He was tutored by the legendary trainer Chickie Ferrara. He is one of the hardest workers in boxing. His ability to network is right up there with Don King's. Lewis was the cornerman in Durán's historic 1980 upset of Leonard. Tyson has said Lewis is the best trainer around.

That's one side of the story. The other began to come to light in November 1982 as Lewis worked Aaron Pryor's corner in Pryor's junior welterweight championship bout with Alexis Arguello. Late in that fight, when Pryor was well behind, HBO, which was broadcasting the event, miked his corner. An assistant held up a plastic water bottle for Pryor, and Lewis was overheard screaming the now infamous order, "Not that

one, the special bottle I mixed." Pryor rallied to take the title with a 14th-round knockout, and rumors from Arguello's camp that Pryor had been given stimulants during the fight spread wildly. Lewis said the bottle held only Perrier and tap water. The late Artie Curley, who also worked Pryor's corner, said the bottle contained peppermint schnapps. The bottle was never retrieved.

Shortly after the Resto-Collins bout, Arguello's manager, Bill Miller, said his fighter had mentioned after his bout with Pryor that Pryor's gloves had felt unusually hard. Randy Gordon says Arguello told him the same thing. "Everyone said Alexis was just whining, but then this happens to Billy Collins," says Gordon. "After that fight Alexis called me up, and he kept going, 'Remember what happened to me? Remember? It's the same thing.' "

In 1983 Lewis was struggling to move past the water-bottle incident, which had not led to any formal punishment but had sullied his reputation. Saturday night at the Garden would be a step in the right direction. His night.

On certain memorable occasions—Willis Reed limping onto the court for Game 7, Wayne Gretzky's debut as a Ranger—Madison Square Garden truly has been the world's greatest arena. On June 16, 1983, the juice was flowing. A crowd of 20,061, the largest Garden turnout in 10 years, was present to watch Moore defend his junior middleweight crown against Durán. Resto-Collins was of secondary interest. Were Collins to win, his next opponent would likely be the Moore-Durán victor. Resto's future was less clear.

Roughly 30 minutes before the fight, Pasquale Giovanelli and Richard Hering, the inspectors provided by Top Rank Boxing, the bout's promoters, watched as Collins had tape wrapped around his hands and his gloves tied on. After finishing in Collins's dressing room, the inspectors went to Resto's. In that room, which was filled with fighters and well-wishers, Lewis barked at Giovanelli and Hering, demanding more time to prepare his fighter. "I get this kind of thing all the time from trainers," Giovanelli said last September, two months before he died. "It's never a big deal." He and Hering saw Resto's hands being taped but then, acceding to Lewis's request, left the room for 10 to 15 minutes. By the time they returned, the fighter had his gloves on.

"A real inspector," says Gordon, "makes Resto take the gloves off and checks them." Giovanelli and Hering had seen the gloves before leaving the dressing room the first time but did not witness them being put on Resto's hands. "Any alteration would have to have been made between the time we left and the time we came back," says Hering, 48, who was working his first professional fight that night. "But because the gloves were new, the outsides would have stayed taut even with an incision."

Said Giovanelli, "I did my job."

That depends on your interpretation of Rule 209.4 in the New York State Athletic Commission's rule book, which states that "[under] no conditions are gloves to be placed on the hands of the contestant until the approval of the commission is stamped on the bandages by its representative."

To Billy Ray Collins Sr., that means a commission representative should have been there at all times during the taping and gloving. But the rule requires only that the inspector approve the bandages before the gloves go on. The one thing that is not in dispute is that Collins took one of the worst beatings in boxing history.

When the two fighters met at center ring, both stared at the floor, impatiently bobbing, taking instructions from referee Tony Perez. "There was nothing memorable about it," Perez recalls. "Two boxers ready to fight. Same as usual."

After the bell rang for Round 1, the boxers exchanged a few introductory jabs and stepped into a fight that those watching would never forget. In the first 20 seconds Collins landed a right-left combination to Resto's head, then took a solid right hook to the jaw. Resto and Collins never stepped far apart. "These two get insulted if you miss them with a punch," CBS's Gil Clancy said early on. "Resto throws a lot of punches, but a lot of his punches are with an open glove. But Collins, when he hits you, you know you're hit."

Maybe so. But while Collins won the first round by connecting with more shots, he was the one backing up. "Ray," recalls his father, "never backed up before."

Not 20 seconds into the second round, a pinkish circle showed up under Collins's left eye. With each punch from Resto, the circle became darker, and by round's end it was broad and purple. The fighters landed a roughly equal number of blows in the round. Collins, never a defensive master, took shot after shot to the chin. So did Resto, but.... "The thing I remember," says Tim Ryan, who was in the booth with Clancy and Sugar Ray Leonard, "is that Resto didn't hit that hard, but he was causing a lot of damage. It seemed strange."

The third round was much like the second, except that Resto was the more aggressive fighter. Collins was landing punches, but they were

late and ineffective. Resto kept firing away, driving Collins back on his heels. With seven seconds remaining, Resto slung a series of right hooks that sent Collins into a crouch. Resto followed with a hard left, then a right. The bell rang, and Resto hammered a late right to Collins's head. Collins answered with two shots at Resto, and the two bumped chests. Lewis, incensed, raced out and screamed at Collins.

Upon returning to his corner, Collins told his father that Resto's gloves felt strange. "I didn't even think about it," says Billy. "Who'd ever heard of taking the padding out? I told him to go back out and fight like a man."

He did, but the next four rounds were all Resto. Collins put up a fight, to no effect. The skin below both his eyes turned purple, and he backed up more and more. In the middle of Round 7 the cut under his left eye began to leak. "One fight like this," said Clancy, "can ruin a young kid like Billy Collins." With 56 seconds left in the round, Collins's legs buckled, and Resto pushed him toward a corner, where he delivered a slew of unanswered hooks and jabs.

"I really believe the swollen eyes are starting to bother Collins," Leonard said on the broadcast. "They look very tender."

Resto never let up, sending Collins reeling, deepening the gash on his face but not knocking him down. "If Resto knew the gloves were messed with," says Billy, "then the way he kept attacking Ray was the worst sin anyone could commit."

At one point in Round 8, Resto caught Collins flush on the jaw, twisting his head like a soda cap. The crowd cheered loudly for the hometown boy. Each shot by Resto was greeted with a roar. The proud Collins kept coming, landing punches but not hurting Resto. Neither boxer said a word to the other. There were no smirks or grins—just more punches. "I'm sure Collins's corner thinks he has a chance," said Leonard in the eighth, "but you have to be realistic."

In the final round, a right sent Collins wobbling three steps back. "You sure hope Billy Collins can finish this fight," said Ryan.

Watching a tape of the bout is a painful exercise. Each of Resto's punches landed like a brick against Collins's skull. Collins fought with astonishing bravery. "Ten rounds," says his father, crying. "Ten rounds against a man with no padding. How much courage is that? How much?"

In the 10th Resto almost knocked Collins out. But not quite. The kid from Tennessee crouched and wobbled but didn't go down.

Immediately after the fight, when Billy Collins grabbed Resto's gloves and accused him of cheating, there was a melee between the two fighters' camps. Later that night the New York State Athletic Commission confiscated the gloves. In addition, Paul Ruiz, the trainer of another boxer who fought at the Garden that night, reported seeing "a strawlike material," similar to the horsehair lining in most boxing gloves, on the floor near a washbasin in Resto's locker room.

Meanwhile, Ray Collins, eyes sealed shut, face seven shades of purple, left the ring to chants of Toro! Toro! from Spanish-speaking fans and returned to his room at the Statler Hilton. His cornermen tried to keep him awake. "They were afraid he might die if he fell asleep," says Billy. The fighter called his pregnant wife. "He told me he was beaten real badly—that his eyes were shut," Andrea recalls. "He said he didn't want to die, but he was afraid. He was really afraid."

The next morning a photographer from Ring snapped Ray's picture. The shot of the young man's swollen face is a haunting portrait of brutality. It is also compelling evidence that Resto's gloves were altered. How could a light puncher wearing normal gloves have done that?

After the fight John Squeri, the state athletic commission's chief inspector, took the gloves from Resto's locker room, put them in a cardboard box and handed them to Jack Prenderville, the state boxing commissioner. According to a 1985 article in *Inside Sports*, Prenderville then handed the gloves to Jack Graham, another official of the athletic commission, who inexplicably left them in the trunk of his car. The next day Graham turned the gloves over to their manufacturer, Everlast, for inspection. ("To Everlast!" says McPherson, Botha's manager, who, like Lewis's other defenders, believes the gloves were altered after the bout. "Do you think the company that makes the gloves is going to admit the product is flawed? Hell, no. It wanted a scapegoat, and his name was Panama Lewis.")

Over the next three days the gloves found their way to a state police laboratory in upstate New York. That's where a three-quarter-inch hole was found on the lower palm side of each glove. Resto's right glove weighed 6.92 ounces, the left 6.96. Each was supposed to weigh at least 7.95 ounces.

On July 1, the commission announced that the gloves had been intentionally tampered with. Prenderville permanently revoked the New York boxing licenses of Lewis and Pedro Alvarado, the two men in charge of Resto's corner, and suspended Resto for at least a year. The bout,

which for a few fleeting moments had been Resto's crowning glory, was deemed a "no contest."

The day after the fight Ray Collins and his father flew home to Tennessee, where they were greeted at Nashville's Municipal Airport by a throng of supporters holding signs and hailing Ray a hero. As they drew closer to the crowd, however, Ray heard something that foreshadowed the harshness of his remaining days: shocked silence.

Hidden behind a pair of sunglasses, Collins's discolored face "was double its normal size," says Mark Young, a longtime family friend. "He was hardly recognizable." His demeanor, usually chipper, was subdued. Andrea took one look at him and broke into tears. "I expected him to be beat up," she recalls, "but it was like he was straight from a horror movie. It was disgusting, but more than that, really sad."

Over the next couple of weeks Ray and his father visited seven ocular specialists, all of whom confirmed the worst: Ray had suffered a torn iris in his right eye. The result would be permanently blurred vision. There would be no more boxing.

Ray started drinking. He smoked pot. He and Andrea began fighting. He hit her often. "Everything Billy'd ever wanted was taken from him," says Young. "He thought he'd be different—that he'd make money for his family and go on to great things. After that fight he realized he'd be raising his family the same way he was raised. To him that was a terrible thing."

He tried getting work but had little success. His first job, painting houses, lasted a couple of weeks, until the boss, concerned about Collins's vision problems, let him go. He was also laid off after a brief stint at a burlap bag factory.

In July 1983 Edward Sadler, a Nashville lawyer, filed a \$65 million lawsuit on behalf of the Collins family against Resto, Lewis, Alvarado, Perez, both inspectors, Top Rank and Everlast Sporting Goods. "We figured that was our ticket," says Billy Collins. "There was no way we could lose. Look at the case. My son lost his ability to earn a living because of gross negligence and a criminal act."

Ray didn't share his father's hope. He hated going out of his apartment, hated the whispers, hated people knowing what he was...what he would never be again. Ray and Andrea had a girl, Alisha, who had her father's eyes. Her arrival didn't lift Ray's spirits for long. He was violent and moody. Andrea moved out of the apartment and took Alisha with her.

At 22, Ray was unemployed and broke. "He was very depressed," Johnny Duke, a friend, would recall. "He didn't believe things would get better."

Ann Collins, Ray's older sister, will never forget his final night. It was cold, with a slight wind. Antioch, as always, was quiet. At about 10:30 Ray and Duke roared up to the front of her house, yelling and cussing and laughing. They were drunk. "Ray came in, and he picked up my little girl," recalls Ann. "He said, 'You wanna see Uncle Billy bum his hand?' He turned on the stove and started putting his hand over it, and she started to scream."

As she talks, Ann sits on a couch in her house, surrounded by Lacy, Amy and their parents. They have told the story hundreds of times. "He put his keys down on the table," continues Ann. "So I picked them up and put them in the kitchen." Then she called her father.

Billy lived just down the street. Three minutes later he came through Ann's front door and approached his drunk son. This was the moment when everything came out. "You want a piece of me, motherf---?" Ray yelled. The two started fighting—"Carbon copies of each other," Ann says—breaking a coffee table, knocking over a wood stove. All the pain and sorrow of a year in one last bout. "Finally," says Ann, "Daddy picked up a piece of wood that was beside my stove, and he hit Ray on the head. He was trying to knock him out so he'd stay there." Ray, blood rushing down his face, knelt and sobbed, "They did this to me.... They did this to me!"

Billy was crying too. Ann gave him the car keys, and he handed them to Duke. "I want you to take him straight home," Billy said. "Do not let him drive."

Billy left the house, as did Ray and Duke. Outside, Ray made his friend give him the keys. "When me and Billy got in the car," said Duke, who died this summer, "he said I had to let him drive. So I let him drive. What was I supposed to do?"

Not more than 10 minutes later, Ann heard sirens whiz past her house. She asked her husband, Jerry, to make sure it was nothing serious. When he returned, however, his face was pale and expressionless. "Jerry never told me Ray was dead," says Ann. "Just that Ray was in an accident, and his eyes were open."

Lacy, meanwhile, was on the way home from a date. He noticed the flashing lights and pulled up to Collins Creek. That's the last time he saw his brother—lying on the ground, eyes open, sticking halfway out of a battered and overturned car. "It was cold as hell," says Lacy, "and I

asked why they didn't have a blanket on him. That's when they told me, 'Well, he's dead.' "

In October 1986 Resto and Lewis were brought to criminal court by the state of New York. Following a long, highly publicized trial, Resto was convicted of assault, conspiracy and criminal possession of a deadly weapon (his fists) and sentenced to a maximum of three years in jail. He would serve 2½. Lewis, convicted of assault, conspiracy, tampering with a sports contest and criminal possession of a deadly weapon, was sentenced to a maximum of six years. He too would serve 2½.

Despite overwhelming evidence that the boxing career of Billy Ray Collins Jr. was ended prematurely by illegal means, the Collins estate (Billy Sr., Andrea and Alisha) never got a dime. After Ray's death, which mooted the \$65 million lawsuit that he and his family had filed in July '83, the Collins estate filed another suit, against the New York State Athletic Commission. That one went on for 10 years—until, on Sept. 12, 1994, a judge ruled in favor of the commission. According to Charles Robinson, a New York City lawyer who represented the estate, the case centered on how to interpret the commission's rule on glove inspection. The Collins estate argued that the inspectors had an obligation not only to glance at the gloves but also to feel them on Resto's hands, to look inside them—to do everything to ensure they had not been tampered with. The commission countered that inspecting is a very broad term that means many things. Did the inspectors have to do anything beyond what they did? It was not clear.

Lawyers for the commission also argued that responsibility for the inspectors' behavior belonged not to the commission but to Top Rank, the promoter, which hired them. Perhaps most important, says Robinson, "when the son died in the auto accident, it ended all potential future damages for loss of earnings, for pain and suffering, because he was no longer alive. And we couldn't tie his dying in that accident to the incident in the ring, because they were two separate situations."

Along with the action against the commission, the Collins estate filed a lawsuit against Giovanelli, claiming he had been negligent in checking Resto's gloves and that this had caused the debacle in the ring. That case ended in a hung jury.

These days Billy and Bettye Collins sit at home a lot. They run errands and visit relatives. As a result of disputes over the lawsuits and the estate, among other things, they no longer speak to Andrea, and they see little of their granddaughter Alisha, whom Andrea does not allow to visit the Collinses.

Billy continues to raise pit bulls. It helps him to contemplate something other than boxing and what it did to his son. And yet, not a day goes by that he doesn't think about what Ray could have done in the ring. "He was on his way," says Billy.

In the Morris Park gym in the Bronx, Luis Resto fills his time sweeping and sparring, sweeping and sparring. He has long since given up on fighting again, but the athletic commission recently approved his request to work corners. That gives him hope.

In his hovel deep below the gym, Resto lives a hermit's life. He is no longer recognized as a scrappy former fighter, not even as the kid who destroyed Billy Ray Collins. "That was a long time ago," he says. "I remember, but who else does?"

In Las Vegas, Francois Botha is preparing for his next fight. His trainer, Panama Lewis, cannot work his corner. But he can earn big money training fighters, and he has done so repeatedly since he got out of jail in 1989. He is part of boxing. Fourteen years after the death of Billy Ray Collins Jr., Panama Lewis is part of boxing.

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